



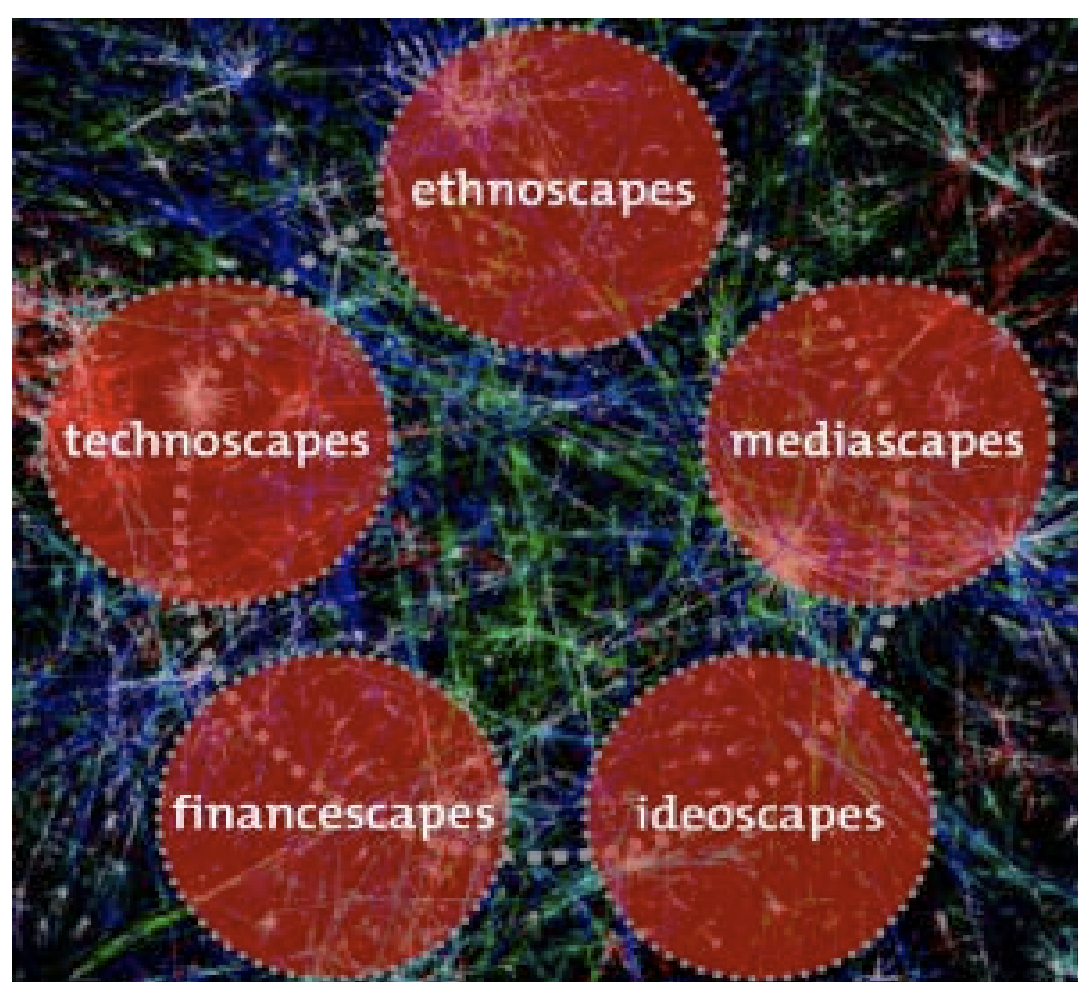
Global Networks, Local Concerns: Investigating the Impact of Emerging Technologies on Shi'i Religious Leaders and Constituencies

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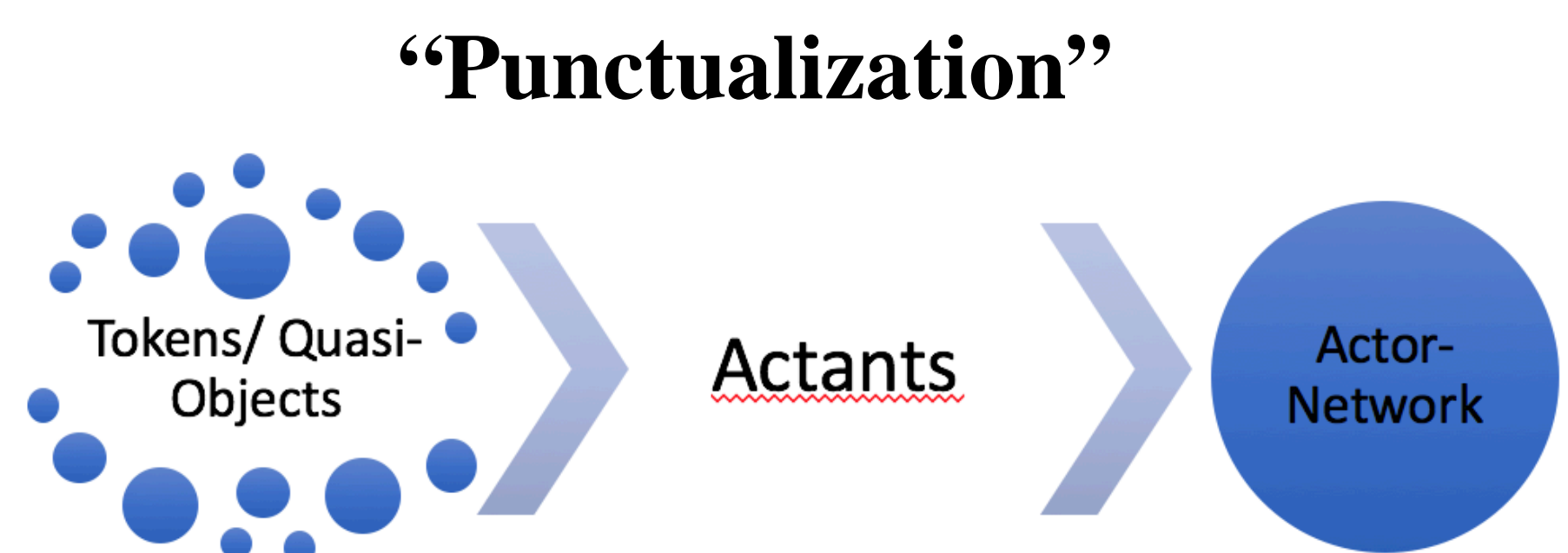
Abstract:

Throughout history religious traditions have had to be translated (or “transmediated”) for new generations in changing contexts of communication. Religion, “cannot be analyzed outside the forms and practices of mediation that define it”. It then becomes paramount to explore how the transition from one mode of mediated communication to another contributes to reconfiguring a particular religious practice. The focus should be on the cultural practices of mediation rather than on the media themselves. However, the extent to which media technologies are driving forces in transformations of Shi'i religious institutions is a key focus in this paper.

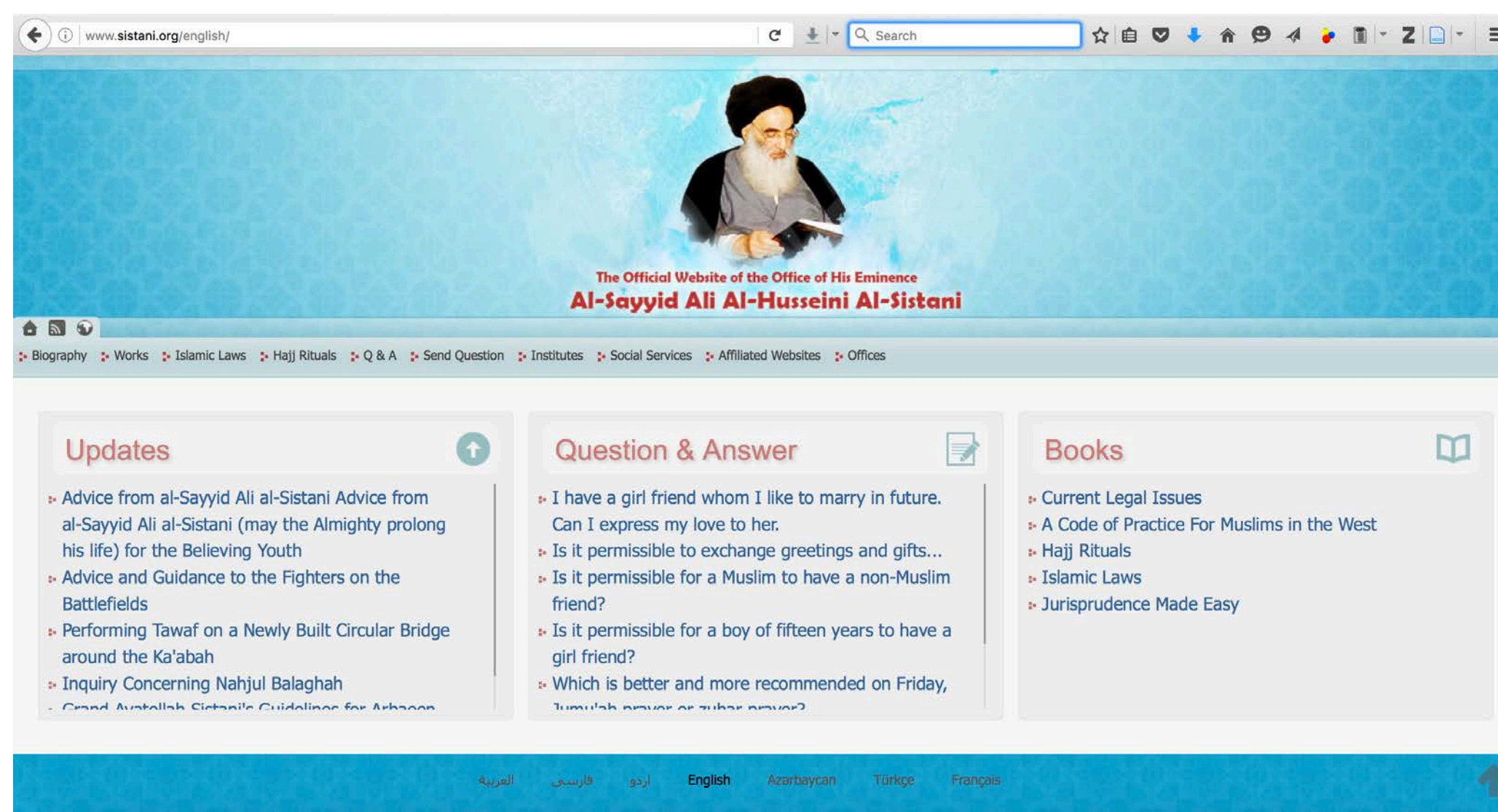
Appadurai's 5 Dimensions of Global Cultural Flows



Latour's Description of Actor-Network Creation



Shi'i Website Creation as Mediatization – A Crucial Step in Forming a Shi'a Actor-Network



Key Terms and Theoretical Frameworks:

Mediatization: designates the process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (e.g. politics, teaching, religion etc.) assume media form. As a consequence, the activity is to a greater or lesser degree performed through interaction with a medium, and the symbolic content and the structure of the social and cultural activity are influenced by media environments, upon which they gradually become more dependent.

Mediation: refers to the communication through one or more media through which the message and the relation between sender and receiver are influenced by the affordances and constraints of the specific media and genres involved.

Khums: annual Shi'i religious tithe equaling one-fifth of wealth of believer after the deduction of expenses = net worth

Actor-Network Theory: Developed by Bruno Latour, who views a network as a descriptive entity that maps relations simultaneously material and semiotic.

Globalization's 5 Dimensions: Developed by Arjun Appadurai as the five dimensions of global cultural flow, which he termed: (a) ethnoscap; (b) mediascapes; (c) technoscap; (d) finanscapes; and (e) ideoscapes. The interaction of these five dimensions represents certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics.

Conclusions:

In this paper a framework has been developed to conceptualize the different ways new media could and already is changing Shi'i religious institutions. The developments are complex and do not necessarily have a uniform impact on Shi'ism. In some instances new media may further a re-sacralization of Shi'ism, as was seen in the employment of historical symbols and texts on the various mujtahid websites. Nevertheless, in other respects, new media undermine the authority of institutionalized Shi'ism and promote new imaginations, rituals and modes of worship. Likewise, the economics of Shi'ism was employed to enact subtle social changes to create actor-networks in potentially hostile socio-political environments through the uses of new media. At a general level, these processes share a common feature: they are all evidence of the mediatization of Shi'ism. This dynamic process will undoubtedly continue to accelerate in the future, creating new actor-networks that may or may not remain tied to the center-periphery dynamics of religious authority in twelve Shi'ism as it had developed in the 19th century.